The Interspecies Newsletter

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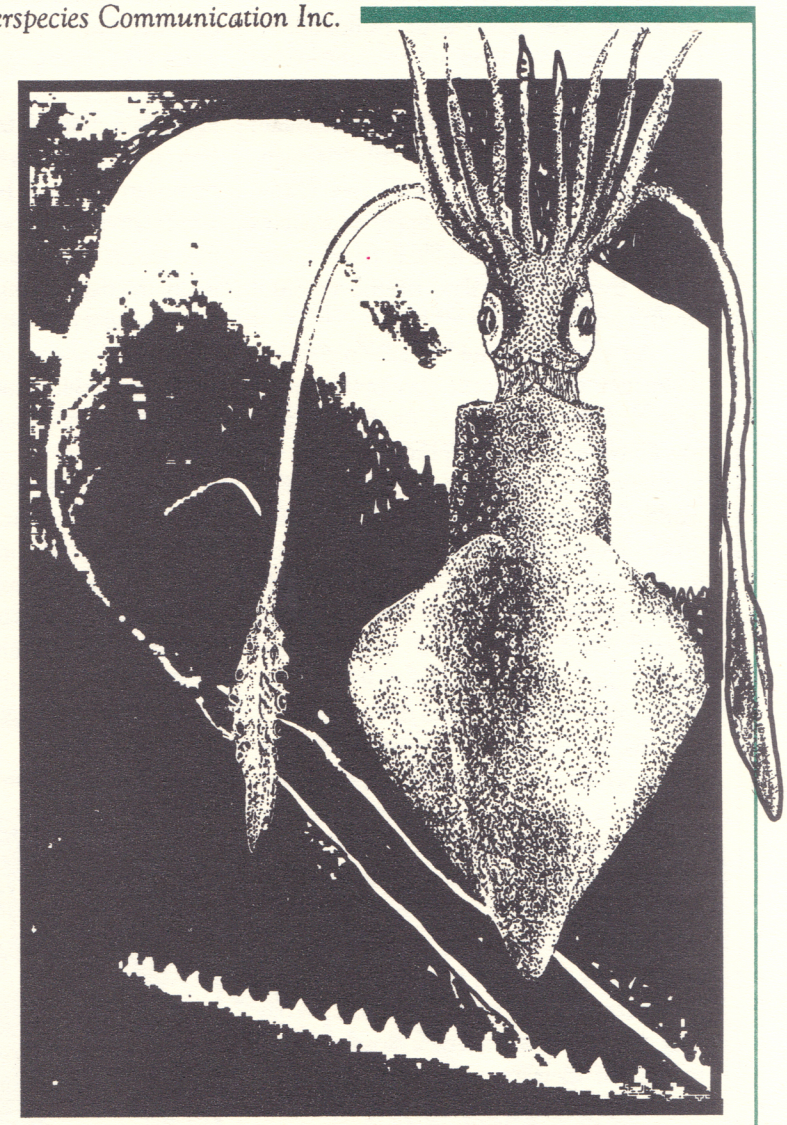
The Sperm Whale Project



Holosonics

The sperm whale probably possesses the largest brain we will ever know. But there's a strong likelihood that so far, no human has ever even tried to make personal contact with the animal. In fact, the only way human beings have related to this species historically is to slaughter it at every turn. Contemporary science can tell us little about this whale beyond the size and weight of its various internal organs. For instance we know this ceatacean's brain can weigh an astounding seventeen pounds. Nineteenth century whalers left us but a fleeting glimpse into the sperm whale's social behavior. We know that the males and females travel separately in their own distinct pods for most of the year. We know the species prefers the deep ocean because it feeds primarily on giant squid. A few researchers, first off Sri Lanka and later off the Azores have recently videotaped sperm whales swimming underwater. The whales seem to spend hours and hours spiralling about one another, never losing tactile contact. The overall image is of some vast gray rose slowly opening its petals.

The conclusion is unavoidable. This gray rose of a whale offers us little of substance, although much to provide the basis of a profound mystery

How might we begin to interact with this species that is, conceivably, the most evolved being ever to inhabit the Earth? In fact, let us imagine approaching this whale at its own slow pace and with all due humility. Let us fantasize greeting this being whom the French name cachelot and the Germans pottwhal, not as a cache or pot of fine machine oil—not as a subject or as a specimen. Let us greet it in a manner human beings never greet wild animals anymore: as student to master, disciple to wisdom keeper—as pint-sized initiates desiring a glimpse into the great unknown.

If our motives are transparent , if our methodology displays compassion, is there any chance this creature might reveal something of it's thought processes, it's knowledge, it's dreaming? Would it tell us if the mind is only a local phenomenon or whether the brain serves, instead, as a kind of radio receiver tuned to thoughts that reside somewhere outside the skull? And what are the sperm whale's conclusions about communication and coexistence with Gaia? What does it know about hyperspace, the unity of past present and future, the alien intelligence of giant squid, the psychoactive effects of sound and deep diving. Can it tell us something—anything—about why we exist at all?

We propose a great adventure. Let's meet the sperm whale in the open ocean, and then attempt to find a common ground of communication with it. But what language might we employ to even begin this difficult process. We at IC recommend that music will serve well as the foundation for contact. Both recorded music and improvized live music might very well display something essential about the human heart, human culture, the pulse of our creativity. It will certainly exhibit something of our joy, our sadness, even our desire to finally transcend the unmitigated cruelty we have exacted so thoroughly on all of nature.

Being There

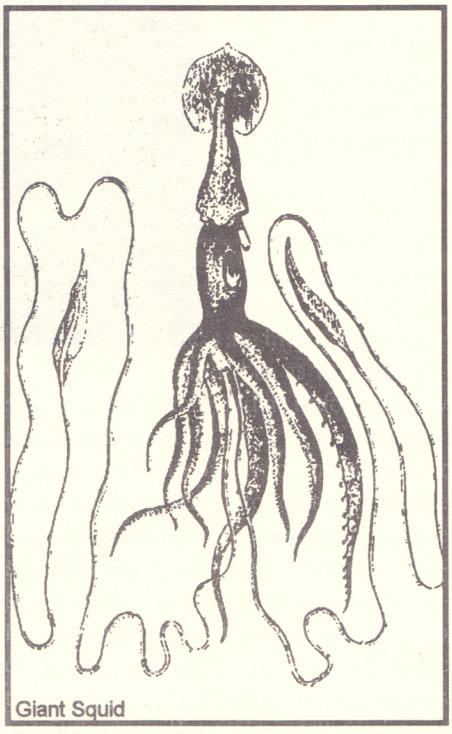
We at IC have begun to promote an interactive project with sperm whales. Our own interest is straightforward enough: We simply want to be onboard when people first attempt to communicate with them. Our own specific goal is to improvize music. To our ear, most animal vocalizations are more akin to music than language. We agree with philosopher Gregory Bateson, who spent some years working to communicate with dolphins, and concluded that attempting to translate cetacean whistles into English or sign language—or even into a made-up halfway language like John Lilly's apple computer-based delphinese—is a futile endeavor, not unlike trying to translate Beethoven into words and sentences.

An idea mentioned briefly in the last newsletter seems worth developing more in this context. Almost all toothed whales use *echolocation* as the primary means of perceiving their often-murky underwater world. A staccato burst of clicks bounces off an object such as a fish and echoes back to the whale where it is recieved through nerve receptors in the jaw. The animal "hears" this echo as an actual three-dimensional image possessed of a certain shape, material density and distance.

Recent evidence suggests that the sperm whale may also utilize echolocation to attain a uniquely sophisticated level of interpersonal communication. Unlike its toothed cousins—the dolphin, the beluga, the orca—sperm whales do not also whistle as a means of signalling simple concepts like identity, distance, and alarm between members of their immediate pod. What they do instead is vocalize a close approximation of their own echolocation clicks back and forth to one another. It seems likely that the species is actually communicating these so-called "echos" back and forth among one another. If its true, then it strongly implies that sperm whales possess a spoken language vaguely analogous to the word-images of the Chinese alphabet. But this language is quite unlike anything we humans can perceive with our own ears and brains. Although it is "spoken" as a burst of clicks, these clicks actually contain the graphic information of a sonic hologram. The clicks are interpreted by the whale, not as sound, but as three-dimensional moving images that unfold directly inside their head.

It seems important to emphasis that whale echolocation follows the same fundamental laws of acoustics that produce sonar imaging in submarines and ultra-sound imaging in pre-natal care. It is therefore not beyond the realm of possibility to consider that we already possess the basic technology to image sperm whale clicks onto a screen. But to image them is one thing. Interpreting them is quite another. For just one trivial example, if the Hawaiian language has over one hundred words for rain and the Inuit language has fifty words for snow, how many words might the deep-diving sperm whale have to describe water pressure? For a more knotty example: how can we conceivably expect our own small brain to map the more comprehensive thoughts of such a larger brain?

Maybe the sperm whales will aid us in understanding them. Consider this. As a direct result of whaling, the sperm whale is today on the endangered species list. Yet although the species is close to extinction as a direct result of human actiivities, sperm whales still do not exhibit any inclination to flee human beings who approach them in boats. They are however, pelagic creatures who approach land infrequently. There are a few scattered locations around the world—the Galapagos, the Azores, Sri Lanka, New Zealand, the Canaries, the East coast of Japan—where sperm whales draw close to shore at certain times of year. In many of these places, sperm whales are suddenly finding themselves to be the subject of a brand new whalewatching industry.



Giant Squid

The Gray Rose

Over the past year, I have introduced the concept of interacting with sperm whales everywhere I have traveled. Describing the potential of the interspecies interaction, discussing its logistical problems, its financing, and proposing various solutions, makes me feel more connected to a growing worldwide network than any other project IC has been involved in over the past twenty years.

In the Canary Islands this past December I told the story of the sperm whale to our workshop gathering. Describing the spiral, the gray rose, the huge brain, the potential mind, the three-dimensional language, the giant squid; I felt I was traveling much the same allegorical ground as the mythmaker who first brought the allegory of the holy grail to King Arthur's court. Two days later the group aboard our ship, the *Kairos*, voted to sail to a location fifteen miles off the island of Gomera, where the deep ocean comes very close to shore and sperm whales were sited just a few months earlier.

I was intrigued when the group next voted to stop the boat and spend the entire day in silence and meditation. In other words, rather than spend the time peering outward—sailing and scanning the ocean for whales—we journeyed inward, spending the time emptying our minds to test the unconventional premise that the sperm whale might even enter one of us.

The sea was uncommonly flat, the day gloriously warm and sunny. In counsel that evening, participants expressed many strong feelings, some of them very strange. Two people independently told of witnessing some unidentified species of whale

breaching a few times off the stern. No one else saw it. Someone depicted the day as a grand tour through a mythical territory. Everyone agreed that silence and meditation are essential elements of any future meeting with sperm whales.

In a way, the IC sperm whale project commenced that sunny day in twelve thousand feet of water off Gomera. Its next series of events are scheduled to manifest when I visit Japan for a presentation tour this June. A deep ocean trench parallels the east coast of that country . Sperm whales linger seasonally near a few of the peninsulas that jut out toward that trench. At Chiba near Tokyo, I will perform at a yearly whale festival, and then lead a weekend workshop which will include a visit to an offshore grounds frequented by sperm whales.

On the Muroto pensinsula on the rural island of Shikoku, seafaring men who were whaling commercially just five years ago, have recently converted their boats to whale watching. June is when the sperm whales venture close enough to shore to observe their passage. Working closely with the organization, ICERC–Japan, IC has made contact with these whalewatching operators in Muroto. I will travel there this June with a representative from ICERC and a TV producer to meet the skippers. If conditions are right we all hope to spend at least one day swimming with sperm whales. The human principles will discuss collaborating next year to film a six-week long meeting at sea with sperm whales.

Mentioning a few of the other talented people who have expressed an interest in participating in this Japanese event grants a potency to the project. One man is a senior scientist at the Jet Propulsion Lab in Los Angeles who wrote the software to help image the radio signals received from the Magellan deep-space probe. He also worked with IC five years ago to devise algorithms for imaging orca vocalizations. Another man, a long time IC member, is a well-known musician and an expert in optimizing the MIDI-interface that joins computers with musical instruments. A woman has led workshops in swimming with dolphins all over the world, and is currently involved in a longterm study of the intuitive side of human/cetacean interactions. In Japan, I will also start a film collaboration with an Olympic medalist in synchronized swimming.

Walk And Chew Gum

Presenting the IC sperm whale project at a series of recent presentations in Germany prompted an entirely different response. It brought together a group of artists, cetacean promoters and media producers to discuss ways an encounter between humans and sperm whales species might be documented. The idea of making a documentary nature film for TV interested no one. What interested everyone is comedy, absurdity, mystery, lots of whale images, and an undeniable interaction between species.

At the present time, a film script is slowly emerging within cyberspace. In brief, our film is geared to be shot in the Azores, which is one of the best places in the world for meeting sperm whales. As if the metaphors we're playing with aren't already tantalizing enough, a white sperm whale is known to visit that part of the Atlantic Ocean periodically.

The film will be a mongrol: part documentary, part science fiction. It should make frequent use of computer animation. The story begins at an interplanetary conference held in the year 2097. People from all over the galaxy have gathered together to commemorate a crucial event in the history of inter-galactic communication that occurred in the Azores in the year 1997. This event is, of course, our own humble expedition to interact with sperm whales. Here's a few snippets from the still malleable script.

...They communicated to one another in a three-dimensional dialect utilizing elements of mathematics, osmotics, and a music vaguely akin to reggae rhythms but devoid of all limitations of gravity.

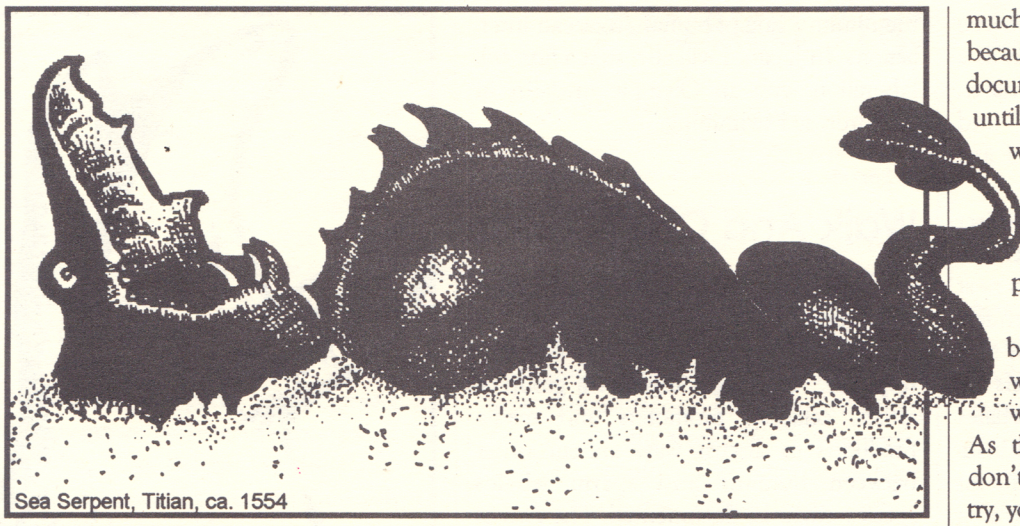
...The camera settles on the rear deck where several people are seated in a circle. A peace pipe passes between them. The group includes a scientist studying holosonic communication, an American

Sea Serptent, Metz, 900 A.D. (looks like Piglet)

Indian storyteller, tap dancers who hope to communicate with the sperm whale on a tin-covered raft, a marine biologist, a woman with a dream to touch a sperm whale, a director of documentary nature films, a psychic, a writer of men's adventure stories, a former whaler, an animal rights activist, a designer of theme parks, a didgeridoo player, a politician.

...Regard this film as a post-modern Canterbury Tales focusing on the human relationship to nature. Each character aboard the sailboat tells how and why they first became interested in connecting with the sperm whale. The stories they weave are heavily dependent on costuming. For instance, as one man talks about collecting data about whales, he suddenly dons a white coat and peers through a microscope that materializes in front of him. As a woman discusses her interest in giant squids–the sperm whales main diet–she morphs into a squid.

...Sperm whales process several ideas at once. We joke about this ability in humans when we say that so-and-so can walk and chew gum at the same time. But how does a sperm whale do it? [On screen, someone tells the story of the Aboriginal dolphin dreamtime. After two sentences we see the story enacted on screen. At that precise moment, another crew member simultaneously starts relating the story of the Dogon myth of dolphins originating in the dark companion star of Sirius. After



Sea Serpent, Titian, ca. 1554

two sentences, the Dogon story gets superimposed over the Aboriginal story. Simultaneously a third myth begins. And so on, until there are eight stories being told and depicted on screen simultaneously. Be playful with this presentation. For instance, have all eight people say one specific word at the same time. Or have the teller of one story finish the sentence of someone telling another story and vice versa.

...No image, a white screen. A woman's voice: "This event was the great leap upward. For the first time since the industrial revolution, the human species finally understood just how limited was its own brain." [film clip of the scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz* singing: "I would wile away the hours, conversing with the flowers...If I only had a brain."] The white screen slowly comes into focus as the camera pulls back to reveal a billiard ball. It is rolling back and forth across a large wooden ship's table with upraised edges. Now we hear the sound of the ball rolling as the film credits also rock back and forth across the screen. The camera pulls back to show that the table is the central piece of furniture in the salon of a large boat. The roll of the ball is caused by the boat rolling through the waves. We see through a gangway, a large group of people gathered on the stern deck.

...In hindsight, it seems ironic that, in his own time Einstein was considered a physicist and not an aesthetic theorist, or that Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle was used exclusively as a description of subatomic physics, instead of as the foundation of shamanic biology. But then, a hundred years ago aesthetics was utilized primarily in entertainment. [Computer animation begins] Humans did not yet comprehend the fact that the animals they perceived all around them were not precisely real, but only a clever disguise, an outfit the real animal put on when it visited the human world. Human beings had no idea that once home again, the animal took off its costume and changed back to its true form, which was exactly the same as the human's true form. This blindness among humans occurred because, a hundred years ago, human beings granted science, economics, and politics the central import in their lives now reserved entirely for osmotic tuning. As we know, the science, economics, and politics of that time successfully conspired to deceive human beings into believing that the animals of planet Earth were mere instinctoids. [Cut to the tap dancers on their tin raft, in squid costume, dancing vigorously in front of a pod of sperm whales. The sound track includes the clicking of the whales.]

IC Nuts, IC Bolts

At the present time, the film exists in bits and pieces, a word and image quilt as much as a film script. It will remain so because, after all, fifty percent of it is a documentary whose events won't unfold until we're on location. What the sperm whales actually *do with us* will define a major share of the film's final content. This newsletter is the first place the film concept has been presented publicly.

IC is not in the film business. I do believe, however, that the greater network will provide a film maker when we are finally ready to ask it to do so. As the *Rolling Stones* once sang: "You don't always get what you want. But if you try, you get what you need."

All to say that IC serves best in its role of non-profit provocateur, creator, and promoter of original ideas. We possess much momentum and credibility in this role. Here's how it works. Two or three times a year, someone from any of several different countries comes calling with a subsidized invitation for one or two or three IC personel to join them out on some ocean or barrens to help test some interspecies premise. We show up, lead a workshop, propose future projects, fantasize filmscripts, present an entertaining two-hour slide show etc. and so forth.

My upcoming tour of Japan is sponsored by Japanese organizations. The Canary Islands link is established through a European University. The onboard workshops I conduct on their boat are administered by their staff. These groups have one thing in common: an administrator whose joy it is to bring people together in workshops, conferences, and presentations. IC has no such administrator.

The result is that IC has produced almost no independent outreach events in the past three years. We do, however, envision a place within the organization for an outreach coordinator. Unfortunately, there are no funds to pay for such a position. Having said that, I must also say that if some enterprising reader would like to take a shot at creating such a job *and* be willing to generate his or her own operating budget, write us. The potential is strong. The IC slide show is a hit in Japan, but practically unknown in the USA. We have books, tapes, cards to sell, but no

marketing strategy to distribute them. IC has no nuts and bolts administrator.

Our current operating budget is stretched thin. Where does this budget come from? Your own membership donations subsidize office supplies, postage, and phone bills. Perhaps more importantly, membership donations keep this newsletter afloat. It balances out.

This newsletter has always played a key role in the dessemination of our ideas. This is where I write up the results, the hunches, the fantasies that develop from each trip. This is where the growing network looks to find them. Regard the newsletter as a well, from which other involved people dip deep for a drink of water. It is for this reason, that I feel so grateful to every IC member, whose $25 donations keep this newsletter active. keep 'em coming!

IC also has a very few longterm patrons. These angels make it possible for three other things to occur.

1. Most years they keep me in the IC office on a half salary. In the years when my salary arrives from other sources, these funds keep the office open so I can volunteer my services.

2. They help IC purchase an occasional crucial piece of hardware or software This month we bought a new modem to facilitate an Internet connection.

3. They subsidize plane tickets, often expensive, for crucial scouting trips to the antipodes of planet Earth.

Obviously, IC hasn't remained in existence for twenty years to protect somebody's cushy job. Without meaning to sound grandiose about it, I consider the work a calling. Sometimes it feels like a burden. Clearly, IC would *feel* more secure with more sponsorship. For instance, this year's budget suggests we may not be able to pay salaries after July.

If IC had greater financial resources *this* month, I would fly to Los Angeles and San Francisco to personally present the film idea to various contacts. We would accelerate our efforts to find a major record company to distribute *Orcas Greatest Hits*.

With more available funds, IC would definitely purchase a much-needed laptop computer to help document the sperm whale work coming up in Japan this June. As it stands, I can do no more than ask if anyone reading this would consider granting IC his or her hand-me-down.

With more funds, we might experiment one more time with a professional fundraiser. It's a thankless job because, in general, foundations tend to fund categories and we tend to slip between the cracks of most categories. On those occasions when we have succeeded at procuring grants, they are always for specific projects and the money arrived only after a vigorous round of phone calls between the foundation director and myself. Yet significantly, not one grant has ever involved an application form. There's a pathetic joke in this office that if a foundation sends a form for us to fill in, we do best to treat the form itself as a rejection slip. I wish it weren't so.

We have tried fundraisers in the past. The first one raised less than a thousand dollars using junk mail to strong-arm the few gentle souls who responded from within the ranks of our own mailing list. But not one foundation responded and, so, this fundraiser very quickly cost us more than she made us. The second fundraiser was a volunteer who arrived on our doorstep like a bolt from heaven. But he asked to be paid by getting to participate in one of our more dangerous Arctic projects. I could't permit it. He left feeling disenchanted.

What we need right now is $15-20,000 more a year. I tend to envision this money arriving in the form of three or four more patrons each committing a tax-deductible $5000 a year to IC for at least ten years. I'm an optimist. Why not?

IC may operate on a shoestring, but our impact is remarkably widespread. My own writing about interspecies communication is currently read by a few million people a year. An IC member in Los Angeles has recently volunteered to set up and administer an Interspecies world wide web page on the Internet. This could expand our network logarithmically. Look for the page starting in May. By the way, we're always interested in hearing ideas about expanding our network. Consider this a call for more activist volunteers.

One last thing. Most potential sponsors want to know what's the connection between our current financial need and the welfare of the planet. In other words, what's in the sperm whale project for the sperm whales?

Need and Seek

To need money is to seek it. In our case, to seek it demands that the network of committed individuals supporting our work continually expands. In Japan, our hope to come together in June recently brought on board two TV production companies, and an offer to perform at a well-known annual whale festival held in a former Japanese whaling city.

The German/Canary Island component of this greater project also relies on a growing network although the dynamic is very different. The arts in Japan are mostly mainstream. In Europe and in the USA, new concepts in culture and art usually develop in "alternative" venues.

The European project will eventually demand that someone within that expanding network take the initiative to find enough money and/or media to subsidize a large sailboat, a group of fifteen people, and a film production company to spend two months in the Azores. We need to be in the Azores, probably on the island of Fayal during the summer of 1997. We need to rent a few houses as home base.

Fish-man, ca. 5000 B.C., Yugoslavia

To need is to seek. The network expands. One hard-working core member of our European network is currently producing a large multi-media cetacean conference to commence in Belgium next Spring. The sperm whale project will be the subject of several presentations. The second part of the conference will be held in the Canary Islands where conferees can participate directly in an interspecies event with pilot whales.

In Japan and in Europe the media's interest in the sperm whale project has already grown far beyond expectations. For instance, The Belgian contingent is currently orchestrating a campaign on the Internet to boycott Norwegian products as long as that country disobeys international law by continuing to kill whales.

One of our own most delicate tasks in promoting the sperm whale project is assisting the Media to document the events *without also trivializing them.* If we succeed—no easy task— then people all over the world will eventually learn about the quest of a group of articulate artists who have joined forces to invent an interface with the sperm whale. Over the next year we hope to generate lots of non-trivialized news, more discussion, more TV shows in Japan, a film in Europe. And eventually an international media event.

What's in it for the sperm whales? *Politically*, all this attention is crucial right now because several nations, especially Japan and Norway are expressing a desire to renew whaling. Our little project will help counteract that momentum. *Culturally*, all this attention is also crucial right now. People on three continents are working very hard because we all agree there's a desperate need to change people's perceptions of nature. We're working on this full time. Join us if you haven't already.

—Jim Nollman, March '95

The Internet

IC is now researching how to do a good web page. If any of our readers has experience on designing Internet formats, we ask for your help. Volume can quickly become overwhelming on the network so we want to do it right, right from the start.

Alaska Trip

We invite our readers to consider joining an eight day cruise and interspecies workshop to Southeast Alaska aboard the 76-foot research vessel, *Pacific Catalyst.*

Our chartered boat is exquisite, built a half century ago as a research ship for the University of California's oceanography department. Expect gourmet food, a very accommodating crew, and some of the most spectacular and untrammeled wilderness in the entire world. We'll be motoring through a country with high mountains, old growth forest, brown bears, salmon, eagles and tidewater glaciers. Ocean currents are swift, up to twelve knots, and some of the more exceptional water passages are steep canyons set between sheer granite cliffs. Also expect an international group of whale revelers and perhaps a few wild and crazy artists. The boat has room for seven more passengers.

But don't expect steaks and lavish staterooms. We regard the eight days not as a grand tour, but as a pilgrimage. Think of our time together as an ongoing workshop about the process of interspecies communication. Together, we sail a remote and misty coast holding a common vision of interacting with whales. We shall spend at least four days seeking the many humpback whales who reside in the fjords. To facilitate our interaction between species, we'll bring along an underwater sound system and several musical instruments. Hopefully, there will be a speaker in each bunk. It's been our experience that listening to the underwater environment all night long definitely affects dreaming.

The Catalyst departs Petersburg Alaska on August 22, 1995. Our return to Petersburg is September 1. The fee, not including air transport is about $2500.

For more info call me at (360)378-5186.

Book Reviews

Gone Whaling

Douglas Hand, Simon Schuster, NYNY, 1994

Doug Hand is a writer who lives in New York City. Without knowing much about whales, one day he decided to write a book devoted to the many varied relations that exist between orcas and human beings in the Pacific Northwest. The result is a short but comprehensive essay that devotes chapters to the training of orcas in the Vancouver Aquarium, the identification work of scientists like Ken Balcomb on San Juan Island Washington, the preservation science of Paul Spong, whale-watching, and the Haida tradition of wood-carvers who revere the orca as totem.

One of the themes that occurs over and over again, contrasts the sacred aboriginal view with the profane scientific and commercial views.

Doug Hand wrote me during his writing process, asking to observe an IC orca project with the intent of devoting a chapter to our work. I was wary of his mainstream male science writer's point of view. In the past, other writers have placed the work of IC into the same pseudo-scientific sideshow category as do the mainstream foundations. With that in mind, I thought it would be helpful—to our own cause, as well as to his writing—if he got other points of view concerning our intent. I wrote back, advising him to start the process of comprehending IC by interviewing a few friends living in New York City who had attended our orca sessions and who were transformed by the experience. He never answered me. Somehow, the book seems incomplete by our absence.

...As I watched the orca, it was impossible to keep myself from imagining the pure pleasure of leaping into the air and soaring with them. I imagined that they were conscious of how they looked, like dancers, sensing if they had fully left the water or had their tail dragging...I believed they felt as I did as a child when I threw myself off the high dive, out of touch with the familiar, supported by nothing.

...I spotted the killer whale totem to my right front and paddled hard toward it, running the kayak up on the beach. It was a mortuary pole. At one time there had been a box atop the pole, with human remains. The killer whale was the only recognizable figure. Its flukes were folded down. A bulbous protrusion emerged from its blowhole, which looked to me like a frog.

The Human Nature of Birds

By Theodore Xenophon Barber, A Penguin Paperback NYNY, 1994

This book is simply wonderful; a study of birds and humans that develops into a profound criticism of our culture's prejudice that animals are not conscious beings. Drawing on years of research, Barber offers intriguing evidence that birds clearly and consistently show they possess intelligence comparable to human beings. He concludes that they just use it differently and then speculates that intelligence is probably universal throughout the animal kingdom. He recommends that it's time we reconsidered our exalted place on the evolutionary ladder.

...All official ornithology texts share a very serious deficiency. They discuss the behavior of birds in general...but they do not recognize that birds are individuals and they never focus on the behavior of one particular individual bird. This book remedies this deficiency by looking at birds not only at the class and species levels but also at the level of particular individuals.

...The avian communication system, which utilizes calls, songs, and body language, is just as instinctively guided as the communication system of humans. Birds are also set to detect the particular sounds of their species and to pass through a "subsong" period that has important commonalties with the human infants "babbling" period. Normal birds, but not deaf ones, also match their vocalizations to the innate patterns of their species' song; in some species the matching is immediate.

...Pairs of terns took turns in relays lifting a disabled flockmate, each holding onto one of its wings and carrying it to safety. A male European robin fed and kept alive a rival male after crippling him in a fight. A male jay guided a human over a considerable distance to an abandoned newborn of a different species that had fallen from its nest.

The Lion King

A video from Walt Disney Pictures

The opening frames suggest that this film is already in serious trouble as a descriptor of natural processes. All the animals of the African Savannah have joined together on the plain to sing an uplifting animal rights, deep ecological anthem about the "circle of life". Nice sentiment, beautiful song, nice image to instill in children. But when the animals finish their chorale, they all bow down like serfs demonstrating obeisance to the prevailing aristocratic order.

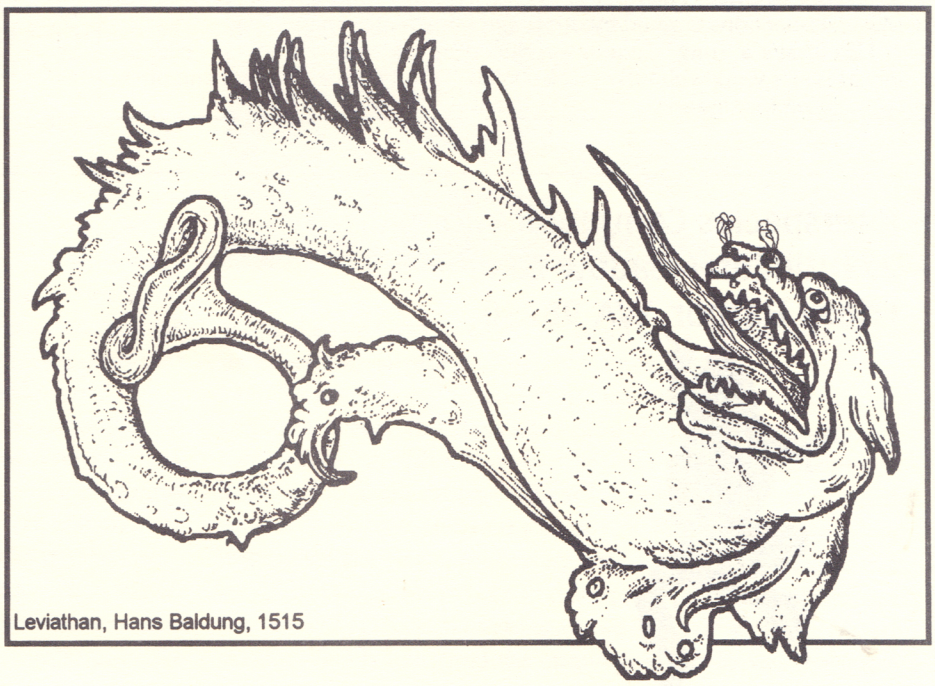
This isn't evolution and animal behavior, It's zebras bowing down to human kids in lion suits. It's corporate America peddling a new line of organic candy bars.

To my jaded mind that bow is mostly a marketing department's way of continually winking at its spellbound audience of children. This film looks like zebras and lions but it's really *The Sword in the Stone* and *Beauty and the Beast* in drag—the latest stop on the cartoon costume ball, this time offering little girls and boys the chance to dress up as king and queen of the Serengeti.

Noting the fact that the voice of the boy-king's father in *The Lion King* is the same voice (James Earl Jones) as Darth Vader-- who is, of course, the boy-king's father in *Star Wars*--my seven year old commented that the latter story is a diluted form of the former. Not bad for a seven year old. I must add however that she's seen the film five times.

In so many ways this film is disorienting: a nonstop exhbition of exquisitely detailed animated graphics of animals and nature fused to a boring formulaic story populated by all the interchangeable characters from all the other of Walt Disney's recent films. Ingenuous but heroic children with endearing funny sidekicks with Brooklyn accents. A sadistic villain with a baritone English accent accompanied by stupid and funny villain's sidekicks with more Brooklyn accents.

Here's my own quirky suggestion for watching this film *one* time. After the first song is over, turn off the soundtrack. Put Ladysmith Black Mombazo on the stereo. Enjoy the graphics.



Leviathan, Hans Baldung, 1515